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ABSTRACT

This study examined the social and political climate surrounding the opening of a controversial gay/lesbian/bisexual support office at an anonymous midwestern public research university. In addition to analyses of university mission statements, plans, and policies, other "diversity" literature, and campus and local newspapers, fieldwork included twenty interviews with faculty, staff, and students on campus. The study explored the university's view of itself as a liberal island in the midst of a conservative environment. It identified tensions that exist when the stated policy of diversity is not matched by diversity in practice and the inherent contradictions when discourse takes place in an "environment of disacknowledgment." It analyzed some of the rhetoric used in support of and against the establishment of the proposal. It is concluded that significant insights into academic and social change can be gained by paying attention to how the practices of identity politics interact with official policies and practices. (Contains 31 references.) (CH)

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Identity politics, institutional response, and cultural negotiation:

Meanings of a lesbian/gay/bisexual office on campus

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HE 029 755

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Paper presented at the 1996 annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education

Memphis, TN

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Memphis, Tennessee, October 31 - November 3, 1996. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

> I think that most of those responses [the creation of the gay and lesbian support office] are sort of token responses and not really substantive responses. I think this university in general is very good at constructing messages that are, for lack of a better term, sort of politically correct without really getting at the roots of most of the problems. . . . But the university is smart enough as an institution, and the leadership is smart enough to know that in the world of academia, it's very important to make those symbolic gestures. In terms of the national reputation of the school, in terms of being able to recruit faculty, staff, and students, and all those kinds of things. You know, it means that they're not completely clueless, it means that the school subscribes to basic sort of liberal values. Again, in comparison to the backlash at a lot of universities and colleges, that's certainly a positive. (faculty member at Liberal U)

The advent of campus activism in the form of identity politics throughout the 1970s and 1980s served as a catalyst for the increasing institutionalization of interdisciplinary courses and programs, such as women's, African-American, and Chicano studies, the rise of hiring and admissions practices that included minorities, and the creation of centers and campus programming related to "diversity." In the context of social movements' impact on university campuses, there has similarly been increasing, albeit sporadic, recognition of gay men and lesbians at universities, a trend some scholars attribute to the increasing visibility of gays and lesbians on campuses (e.g., D'Augelli, 1991; Tierney, 1993a). The constitution of student organizations, support and counseling services, and the addition of occasional courses and undergraduate minors taught in the emerging field of gay and lesbian studies have been the prevalent forms of social and academic recognition on campus (see D'Emilio, 1992, particularly on the links of activism to the rise of gay and lesbian studies). As gays and lesbians have increasingly gained what I would suggest is a semi-codified minority status at universities in the 1990s, there has been a concomitant rise in student organizing and legal battles against such official recognition and support (see Mangan, 1995).

In this paper, I examine the highly contentious opening of a gay/lesbian/bisexual support office at Liberal U, a public research university.[1] My concern with examining the creation of the office lies in an interest in what it means for gays and lesbians to become the most recent "diversity" in an epoch in which there is growing backlash against "special interest" groups and in which academic institutions manage group identities as problems to be responded to and managed. Despite the dangers of containment involved in claiming a group identity, identity politics are consonant with the structures of university systems predicated on serving constituencies, and perhaps therefore efficacious in creating resources for change. Specific practices of diversity, which entail the constitution of identifiable groups in order to garner recognition and services, must be understood in the context of the university's mission, social and institutional contexts within and beyond the university, and the relations of (gay and lesbian) identity politics to tenets of liberal education. I thus ask the following questions: What might gay and lesbian identity politics on campus enable and constrain? What are the effects of the constitution of visible groups in a system of liberal education? As I consider these questions, I examine the social and institutional contexts of diversity and the locations and effects of diversity discourses at Liberal U.

The data and analysis presented in this paper comprise a portion of a larger six-month ethnographic study focused on the academic practices of lesbian faculty at Liberal U. For the purposes of this paper, my fieldwork included analysis of the university's mission statement and strategic plans, policies, campus and local newspapers, brochures and statements produced by a

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1 All names are pseudonyms.

number of diversity offices, and some twenty interviews with faculty, staff, and students across campus. My narrative and analysis pertaining specifically to the opening of the gay and lesbian support office are based on extensive newspaper coverage of events, internal and external documents that were shared with me, and interviews with a number of participants and observers. In seeking to understand the social and institutional contexts and the events that unfolded, I juxtaposed official policy to unofficial accounts in newspapers and to actors' reflections on their lived experiences at the university to arrive at a nuanced accounting of the relations of policy to social structures in and beyond the campus.

I begin by depicting the fragmented relations of the state, the town of Oasis, and Liberal U as they inform understandings of policy, practice, and social life at the university. As my discussion of the university proceeds, it is crucial to understand that what is set forth in policy and what I present as prevailing social and academic discourses are not isomorphic but interpreted and enacted differently in multiple locations.

Locating the Liberal U Campus

> As we strive to create a new idea of the public university, the circles in which we move expand in size and complexity. But always at the center of these many circles, firmly rooted in honorable traditions and civilizing activities, remains the campus. (closing sentences of Liberal U's mission plan)

Liberal U is a public research university, highly nationally ranked in many of its departments and professional schools, with a total population of between 30,000 and 40,000 students. The university is situated in a politically and socially conservative Midwestern state whose primary industries lie in manufacturing, retail trade, and the service industry. The state is

strikingly racially homogeneous.[2] While the state government and overall state voting patterns are predominantly Republican, the town of Oasis, in which Liberal has a prominent place, has a strong, though not consistent, pattern of voting for Democratic candidates in local, state, and national elections.

Almost invariably, as I spoke to people in the university and town, they described Oasis as an island, a sort of protective sphere. One faculty member who does antihomophobic work in the university and town contentedly explained to me: "Oasis is a caring place, a sort of a liberal island in a fairly conservative environment." For her, as for others who described the town, Oasis is distinguished from its conservative surroundings by its history of social compassion. However, not all are in agreement as to the positive dimensions of this refuge. A young lesbian student, for example, was able to map the town and the university, both ideologically and geographically, speaking of those beyond her sphere in totalizing terms:

> I can't emphasize this enough, that Oasis is an island. I've been told by people not to drive alone out in the country, because this is KKK territory. It's an island, if you cross a certain line. People can feel really "out" here in Oasis, but it's not real, it's just an artificial set-up, situation. There's nothing inherently gay/lesbian friendly in Oasis, the gay/lesbian population in Oasis can feel out because of the university. I don't know what the community would be like without the university. . . . When you get into the townies section, outside the university section, it turns into standard conservative redneck, ... right wing conservative, low middle class, low class people who've been brought up in racist, homophobic, anti-Semitic homes, and that clashes incredibly with the university.

Despite its conservative surroundings and the pronounced lack of interaction among racial and ethnic groups, Oasis has something of a reputation for being a positive environment for gay men and lesbians. In fact, several years ago the predominantly Democratic City Council

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2 White people constitute nearly 90 percent of the population, African-Americans (grouped primarily in two urban centers) under 8 percent, and generically grouped "Hispanics" under 2 percent.

passed a human rights ordinance that includes sexual orientation. The event suggests the disjunctures among liberal groups in Oasis and more conservative social and political forces across the state. Terry, the owner of the local women's bookstore, remembered:

> About two years ago, the City Council wanted to put into the human rights ordinance as a statement, a philosophical statement which had no teeth to it, it couldn't be legally enforced because we don't have it up at the state level, adding on to, as a symbolic gesture that you couldn't refuse people housing or a job or in any other ways discriminate against them because of their sexual preference, along with all the other things that are in law. And there was an uproar. The fundamentalist Christians got bused in *from all around*, there were so many people the meeting had to be moved from the city hall to a church. While it was being set up, they sang hymns till two or three o'clock in the morning. These people were calling us diseased and pedophiles and necrophiliacs and drug users. It was horrible, there were people from the Ku Klux Klan there with their shirts, so out there in the community at a certain level, there's a tremendous amount of homophobia.

Thus, although there is, by all reports, a significant, if not highly visible, gay and lesbian population in town, living in Oasis requires a certain caution on the part of gay men and lesbians. The resulting lack of gay and lesbian visibility despite the purported size of the population suggests an uneasy atmosphere of tolerance: active identification of self or the constitution of a group may upset the precarious balance of liberal tolerance for individual rights and the homophobia of certain pockets within and beyond Oasis.

As a nationally ranked university, Liberal U is in a curious position in relation to its surroundings. While Oasis is markedly different from the state in which it is located, Liberal U is also distinct from Oasis.. The maps that are imagined by members of the university community generally place Liberal U at the center, parts of Oasis directly adjacent to or constituted by members of Liberal U's communities as a concentric circle around it, and unknown or non-university-related parts of Oasis as part of the outside. Furthermore, as I discus below, university policy constructs the institution as elite, distinct from its surroundings, and

offering a level of excellence to those outside its circle (as suggested in the epigraph to this section). Thus, although there is no singular characterization of Liberal U that can be distilled from conversations or official statements, a pattern that emerges suggests an institutional identity for the university that is internally contradictory. Liberal U is in many ways defined against what surrounds it, or by what it is not. In the logic of twentieth-century liberalism in education, self-definition through opposition with what is outside it creates a situation in which the university represents, serves, and educates the very people, its constituencies, against whom it defines itself. The paradox of defining itself as different from yet representing that which is outside creates a number of tensions for the university as it seeks to justify and enact its mission as a public research institution.

One of the salient tensions created by the disjunctures that exist among the state, town, and university lies in the fact that the state is the context that defines legislative and budgetary constraints on the university. Liberal U must define its mission with an eye to legislators' support, constituencies' needs, and the public's responses to its purposes and methods (see Piven, 1983, on the constraints on universities to respond to social and academic changes and challenges). In fact, Liberal U has been succumbing to what Joan Scott (1995) has described as the "rhetoric of crisis in higher education," allowing prevailing public unease with higher education to dictate much of its policy talk. Although the state legislature has granted continuous funding increases to the university during the 1990s, they have been at lower levels than the university has requested (4 percent as compared to 7 percent). Thus, the administration at Liberal U invokes the threat of budget cuts to justify institutional decisions, seeking public

credibility by framing its purposes as consonant with an understanding of education as economic development (see Benjamin, 1995) and as serving individual needs. Symptomatic of the vilification of the public sector and the glorification of the private sector that currently prevails in public discourse (Apple, 1995), Liberal U has appropriated the language and practices of business and industry in projecting its image as an institution that serves its public efficiently. What William Bergquist (1992) calls the "managerial culture" (pp. 4-5) of the academy predominates in conversations of institutional accountability and productivity: the assessment of student and faculty output, access, and excellence form the basis of the university's public justification of self in an epoch of fiscal restraint for higher education.[3] As private and public languages and purposes are simultaneously invoked, there is an interesting way in which the accountability question reinscribes an "us" (the university) that must respond to a "them" (the public) that "we" claim to represent and by which "we" are ostensibly constituted, thus highlighting the problem of the university's representing that from which it distinguishes itself. Efficiency, accountability, and excellence play a role in structuring diversity discourses, both in policy and practice. Furthermore, these diversity discourses intersect with the incoherences of "gay definition" to produce specific difficulties in the creation of a new group and attendant services.

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[3] See Nelson and Bérubé (1995)for a discussion of the ways partisan attacks that decry "politicized" university curricula and admissions procedures have combined with non-partisan critiques that proclaim the failure of universities to educate and credential, thus creating public unease with higher education and "a climate in which universities are vulnerable and in which public resistance to [funding] cuts is almost non-existent" (p. 7).

Social and Academic Diversity in Policy

Within what is a diffuse organizational structure, generalizations about the university's mission and ongoing initiatives, such as the ways in which they are received, understood, ignored, or enacted by individuals or groups, are impossible to make. However, policy statements offer a point of reference for understanding how knowledge, diversity, and academic and social life are officially defined and subsequently redefined in practice--or what interventions those definitions allow--to create the enacted mission of a university.[4] I thus highlight several elements of Liberal U's strategic plan for the 1990s as they bear on diversity. In discussing the creation of the gay and lesbian office, I point to the ways these discourses structure the tactics of gay and lesbian groups and the institution's response to them.

The university's mission aligns itself with democratic progress, defined both in terms of individuals and society. The premises of individual and collective advancement are based in a "liberal view [that] suggests that the state is the collective creation of its members, providing a set of common social goods" (Torres, 1995-96, p. 275). The goal of educating students, "not solely to certify them for professional employment, but to leave them with a sense of ethical and social vision, a love of learning, and a complex, nimble intellect," as stated in the strategic plan, reflects what Torres (1995-96) defines as three principal functions of liberal education:

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[4] David Trend (1995) has pointed to the ways in which administrative reports and documents "assert specific ideological narratives while purporting political neutrality and scientific rationality. They attempt this split in their contents, language, forms of address, and the circuitous channels of expert discourse peculiar to bureaucratic speech. Yet it is important to point out that, like all other texts, such documents never assert a virtual authority. Their meanings are constructed in communicative exchange, so they are always open to subversion or revision" (pp. 103-4). In other words, both the policies themselves and their reception and enactment are not given products, but constructed processually through multiple layers of negotiation.

"cognitive and moral socialization, skills training, and certification" (p. 277). Thus, the university's goals are represented in academic, social, and economic terms. Diversity, however, lies primarily in the domain of the social.

There are eight references to "diversity" in Liberal U's strategic plan. The first falls in the general introduction, setting up a dichotomy of excellence versus access in official policy: "There is much to be done, much that requires creative balancing. The campus must ensure, for example, that it attracts the best students in the state and nation and also supports and aggressively seeks out disadvantaged students." The difficulties of "balancing" quality and democracy and the university's distinction from but necessary representation of "disadvantaged" groups is reflected in the ambivalent place of "diversity" in the academic mission. Knowledge to be taught is organized by subject areas "which, though constantly changing, are delineated by custom, necessity, and tradition."[5] Revealing what knowledge is of value, the university explains that it "dedicates itself strongly to basic instruction in the arts and sciences as the foundation of undergraduate education" at the same time that it "is committed to the maintenance of quality academic degree and non-degree programs that focus on the cultures of ethnic and racial minorities and other groups that have experienced disadvantage and discrimination." Custom and tradition define a foundational "core" and necessity (pressure from constituencies, or the multicultural imperative) has defined a periphery that may be added on to

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[5] Whose customs, necessities, and traditions remains unclear, unless it can be inferred that they are those of the "public," which may mean individuals and constituencies, business and industry, the state and the nation, or the institution itself. The role of faculty, students, and members of university communities in redefining the organization of knowledge or definitions of knowledge is not addressed in the mission statement (see Gumport, 1988, Tierney, 1991, 1993a, for discussions of the ways in which faculty, institutions, and communities mediate local conceptions of knowledge). Such an appeal to the organization of knowledge as customary or traditional naturalizes the existence of academic "subjects" by obscuring the political and social nature of knowledge and disciplinary formations.

studies in the core, either as a contrast or supplement to that which is central.[6]

The primacy of "diversity's" location in the social rather than the academic is highlighted by the placement of a statement that "discrimination on the basis of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, nationality or any other such arbitrary criteria will not be tolerated on the Liberal U campus" is included in the strategic plan's section on social development. No related statement is made in the sections on economic or academic development, revealing a policy logic that relegates work against "discrimination" to social and interpersonal domains. Furthermore, while discrimination is represented as a social problem, diversity is figured as a social asset. The strategic plan states that "The diversity of the student body is an integral part of an education on the Liberal U campus. The campus is committed to the belief that opportunities to interact with others from diverse backgrounds can result in increased understanding and appreciation of differences, immeasurably enriching the perspective of all members of the academic community." Commodified as a source of perspective enrichment, diversity becomes a marketing strategy. However, social perspectives valued in the rhetoric of diversity are in direct conflict with the university's academic ideals. Liberal U's Code of Academic Ethics, for example, states that "a scholar recognizes a primary responsibility to seek and state the truth without bias," a stance that is present in campus ideologies as well.[7]

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[6] The Bulletin of Liberal U reveals that the university offers a major in African American Studies and non-degree programs in Chicano Studies and Women's Studies. However, there are no programs in Gay and Lesbian Studies or Sexuality Studies. For a critique of the center-periphery model of foundational and supplementary studies, see Spanos (1993).

[7] Students, for example, complain that faculty are not detached from the ideas they present in classrooms. One student newspaper editorial commented that faculty who teach their opinions rather than a range of perspectives "rob students of a complete education." Another student argued that "one of the greatest disservices an instructor can administer to an undergraduate student is to ignore his or her role as objective teacher." Letters to the editor frequently complain that

The President of Liberal U has explained that because Liberal U constitutes "a microcosm of the values and ideals of the state and the nation," it is "uniquely situated to influence the development of our students by exposing them to a truly diverse educational experience." However, as Liberal U institutes social (and academic) programs meant to enrich community members' perspectives, it is caught in a peculiar situation. Liberal U is not and does not represent "a microcosm of the values and ideals of the state and the nation." The university is indeed *accountable* to the values and ideals of the state and nation, but is not a mirror image, an embodiment or reflection, of those ideals. Furthermore, in an epoch of antifeminist and affirmative action backlash, there is no reason to believe that the state or nation holds "diversity" as a value or ideal. Rather, the current trend in cultural politics constructs a focus on diversities as dangerous to national unity (Giroux, 1994; Trend, 1995; West, 1993).

The structuring of diversity in social terms, the confounding nature of equitable access for social groups and its intrusion on excellence, and the perspectives attached to diversities that are implicit in policy reveal themselves in practices of diversity on campus. I discuss institutional and social responses to diversity at Liberal U, for it is into these discourses that gay and lesbian activists enter as they are constituted as a group.

Diversity in Practice

As a public institution funded and regulated by society and its constituencies, Liberal U is bound to operate within the dictates of a liberal politics that conceives of individuals abstractly

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faculty's opinions are left unchallenged, "particularly in classes with controversial themes such as race, gender, and political ideology." Thus, perspectives may be acceptable for enhancing social interaction, but are suspect when they interfere with objective academic knowledge.

(Jaggar, 1983) and of public institutions as neutral in sociopolitical relations (Torres, 1995-96). These (a)political assumptions create a well-intentioned liberal stance that seeks to offer access to diverse constituencies. However, because university policy focuses on numerical representation and ignores the ways in which "university-speak" itself contributes to the location of "diverse" groups, university programs inadequately address concrete material and structural oppressions that can block easy incorporation of "diversity." Instead, the underlying ethos is one of accommodation in response to external social change. Meg, a graduate student activist and member of the Lesbian Avengers, asserted in a conversation about the administration and various diversity initiatives:

> I don't know how much the university can do because it's so much the norm. I mean, university administrations are middle America, they have to be, they're public institutions. If Liberal U has instituted a diversity program, that means it has become part of American consciousness, that means it's like *Newsweek* culture. I can't imagine asking the Liberal U administration to do things that *Newsweek* wouldn't do. Or that *Time* wouldn't do. What else can you say? It is the system, it loves the system, it will be the system, and it won't be radical, that's it by definition, which doesn't mean there aren't things that can't be done that will make life more livable for people.

Although diversity initiatives and programs are largely reactive, that is, instituted in response to social demands, their increasing presence at Liberal U suggests that what "the system" will do is open to pressure and change. While Liberal U's ability to alter its organizational, academic, and social structures is limited by its accountability to the state legislature, pressures "to make life more livable" for constituencies create openings for social and cultural change. Thus, officially at Liberal U, diversity is a numbers game of representation that is managed and measured, in which efficient performance is won through programs for faculty and student recruitment and retention. However, unofficially, groups may use the resources provided by such programs for

purposes that are not officially codified. In this way, although representational politics has limitations as a form of accommodation, it constitutes a process of ongoing negotiation and change as differences are recognized.

In the context of increasing institutional recognition of difference, Chandra Mohanty (1990/1994) has argued that "[t]he central issue, then, is not one of merely *acknowledging* difference; rather, the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged" (p. 146). Further, as her analysis of diversity at a liberal arts college makes clear, *how* those differences are attended to is significant, as well as for what reasons and in what contexts. The "diversity problem," when conflated with the two r's, recruitment and retention, suggests that diversity is conceptualized in terms of constituency logic: certain groups must be represented in certain locations--and for certain reasons. For example, African-Americans are sought after by the administration, which employs rhetorics of perspective enrichment and democratic access. They are at the same time a potential danger, in the talk of both students and the administration, to meritocracy and standards of excellence. However, the university's democratic mission, combined with the need to comply with federal laws and the exigencies of accrediting agencies, results in multiple efforts to diversify student and faculty bodies. Women present another problem. While the rhetoric of enriching perspectives does not enter justifications for their hiring, equity in representation in specific locations (senior faculty) is cited as a concern. The justificatory rhetoric for the recruitment and retention of female faculty is not as inflated as it is in the case of African-American faculty and students, perhaps because there is less inflammatory and overt resistance among members of the Liberal U community. Where gender issues do meet resistance is precisely in the area of

(feminist) "perspective," when faculty choose to conduct research or to teach classes in which gender is a central category of analysis. Gay men and lesbians differ significantly from African-Americans and women in terms of the challenges they pose. Because they are not a group that has been codified in many spheres, recruitment and retention is a non-issue, except as it pertains to equitable educational opportunities. Thus, there is not a frequently articulated fear of weakened standards or a rhetoric of perspective enhancement. Instead, as I discuss below, the results of gaining a sort of semi-codified group status have been heightened talk of the problems stemming from their identities/differences, problems that include psychology, disease, and (im)morality.

Both in policy and in practice, the "diverse" communities, or "niches," as I frequently heard persons say, that have been constituted function as distinct enclaves with clearly delineated borders, both imaginary and tangible, that define individuals' affiliations and activities. Communities based on categories of identity are represented as discrete rather than intersecting or overlapping. As groups have been constituted, the visibility they have achieved has been along the lines of prototypes or ideals to the exclusion of internal inconsistencies and incoherences. Gay and lesbian persons are represented as white, women as white and heterosexual, and "raced" persons as African-American (for the most part) and heterosexual. Thus, each singular category is understood to be continuous with a set of experiences and difficulties that flow from intact identities, which in turn form the basis of affiliations (niches),

needs, and responses (services and programs) by the institution.[8] However, the contexts that produce those experiences and identities are not interrogated. Instead, they are managed through support or representation in a system of what Warner (1995) calls a "corporate multiculturalism," a "pluralist affirmation of cultures, where cultures are conceived on a racial or ethnic model" (p. 289) in which "irreconcilable demands are dealt with by giving every constituency its own course or, if necessary, program" (p. 290).

In its commitment to granting various social and ethnic groups access to the university and bringing multiple perspectives to campus life, Liberal U has committed significant resources, in terms of a plethora of decentralized offices and programs, to the recruitment and retention of students. However, in a system that is constructed largely in terms of numbers (input and output) in an individual, representational model that ignores the quality, content, and effects of institutional and social structures, the addition of offices and programs distracts attention from underlying problems and relieves colleges and departments of shared responsibility for diversification of faculty and students. One staff member commented:

> I call this community the neo-liberal community, ... we've convinced ourselves that we're so politically correct that everything's been addressed and is cool. And it's not, it's addressed with this panacea, you know. . . . . It's this obsession with not being offensive which in a round-about way is not addressing anything. . . . We have this attitude that we aren't racist, we're integrated, we accept anybody, we have all these centers and diversity offices and all this and we're just fine. And yet when you look at the representation of people, particularly groups of color, they're not here.

On a more specific level, a director of a multicultural organization told me:

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3 Few persons expressed concern that there was ongoing inattention to and lack of consciousness of the "intersections" of race, gender, and sexuality. One program director, however, did comment, "People sort of have their enclaves, which is one of the ways the system keeps people down, sort of colonizing them." A student activist explained: "Students see [gay and lesbian] issues as white issues, and I'm trying to get out there to show that people of color are in this. People of color are afraid to be identified. Coming out will affect their position in the communities they're in already." Identity at Liberal U is represented as a coherent whole: a position in a category determines one's circles of affiliation, setting up structures akin to what Fuss (1989) describes as a "hierarchy of identities" (p. 116) in each individual.

> I think they [the administration] look for groups like this to sort of take the heat off them sometimes. If we have a [multicultural office], then we must be doing okay with issues of diversity. But institutionally, I think the institution welcomed the office. Now they don't always pay a great deal of attention to us and they don't give us adequate funding to do what we need to do, but it looks good. . . . We find that the Institution, capital I, sometimes expects us to deal with all of those problems, if a faculty member engages in anti-Semitic or homophobic or sexist behavior, we're supposed to fix it, and it takes the onus off of the academic department, and it's the academic department that ought to be fixing it, not us. So we've kind of had to fight this notion that once we had the office in place, we can shift everything to them and we can wash our hands of it.

Although the offices represent a source of change, their existence also breeds complacency across large segments of the institution. As an example of the ways concern with numerical representation generates attention to programs that might enable the university to attract isolated individuals while abstracting them from social, political, and institutional contexts, the predominantly white administration regularly expresses concern that representation of African-American faculty and students is low. An administrator explained in a news interview, "For Liberal U to be among the top universities in the world it must continue to attract the best and brightest African-American students and faculty." Toward this end, the administration has recently enhanced the Black Cultural Center, a space that includes a library, tutoring center, and other resources. As a Dean explained, it is a place for "African-American students to feel at home," and gives them "an extra hand in coping with a white campus." While the Center offers students a resource that they may appropriate for their own uses, it does not signify institutional commitment to structural change, as suggested by the Dean's assumption that the campus will continue to be white, a place for black students to "cope with."

The incoherence of excellence versus access present in Liberal U's policy statements and the provision of specific services to targeted groups surfaces in frequently articulated student

discourses. Students who speak against diversification argue that promoting diversity involves a lessening of standards of excellence, it is divisive as it calls attention to differences that are irrelevant in a meritocratic system, and discriminates against those (whites) who excel, offering them no "special" services. Students who support diversity and affirmative action have no more propensity than the administration to question structures of oppression; they believe that a place on the field makes the playing field level. Talk of race, then, sets up a false dichotomy of diversity and excellence or a situation in which the two can not be seen as coexisting (see Farmer, 1993). Second, it constructs equality as the opposite of difference, mistakenly confusing sameness and equality and ignoring the fact that "the political notion of equality thus includes, indeed depends on, an acknowledgment of the existence of difference" (Scott, 1988, p. 44). Thus, although perspectives are said to be sought after, the differences that are assumed to generate these new perspectives are a hindrance both to excellence and to equality (when understood as sameness).

Into a system of diversity that is considered socially--yet abstractly--and is predicated on accountability, representation, and access, enters a newly vocal group that seeks official status and recognition. The constituency logic of the university enables talk of serving their needs; yet, the problems they are seen as bringing to the campus are articulated through the prism of diversity discourses. Their specific "social problems," naturalized as stemming from their gay and lesbian "identities" pose further threats to unity, excellence, and equality.

Entering Gay and Lesbians

With the exception of the formation of a social-activist group a few years ago, campus

organizing and gay and lesbian visibility had previously been, if not submerged, then somewhat "behind the scenes." The campus "climate" for gay men and lesbians is one in which some undergraduate and graduate students are "out" on campus and very few gay and lesbian faculty are open about their sexuality (many spoke to me of concerns with their credibility with students and colleagues if their sexuality were public). Despite some incidents of harassment among students, persons consistently explained that homophobia was not "overt," that it was enacted subtly. One faculty member explained: "With faculty, it's still the same don't talk about it and it's okay kind of stuff. But I don't think anybody's actively harassing. I don't think it fits their image of being liberal. We're open-minded individuals here." According to many with whom I spoke, the liberal ethos that prevails is one of "don't ask, don't tell," in which structures of willful ignorance relegate sexuality to private domains.

Despite an environment of disacknowledgment, sexual orientation was included several years ago in the university's non-discrimination clauses. I am told, actually, that sexual orientation was added gradually, first in student handbooks, then in faculty handbooks, and finally in hiring and other policy statements. Domestic partnership benefits, however, have not "slid in" so easily. Although the faculty council passed domestic partner benefits, the Board of Trustees tabled the proposal, officially citing economic viability and difficulties of "proof" of partnership as its reasons, thus constructing domestic partnership benefits as a special privilege and same-sex relationships as unverifiable, in contrast to naturalized heterosexual relationships.

Centering Gays and Lesbians

> This is a WASP university, and they don't talk about these things. Meanwhile everybody knows that there are lesbians, and a lot of them. I mean this is not a small category. (faculty member)
>
> It's a campus that talks about these things. (faculty member)

Liberal U could in many ways be characterized "as a campus that talks about these things," even as it disacknowledges them. Student activism and external social pressures have created a situation in which "these things" are in fact surfacing in official and unofficial conversations. In particular, the polemics around the opening of the support office for gay and lesbian students at Liberal U and its galvanization of a number of groups and individuals resulted in talk of homosexuality predominating in the student, and to a lesser extent, local newspapers for several months. The talk and activities surrounding its inception offer a point of analysis for the intersections of gay and lesbian identity politics, liberal democratic educational ideals, and the difficulties of diversity discourses on campuses. The propaganda created by the multiple "sides" claiming stakes in the debate and the events that occurred in some ways exemplify Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1990) identifications of minoritarian and majoritarian discourses around (homo)sexuality,[9] as the rhetoric of identity politics and minority rights--as well as reactions to it--comes to the fore. I begin with a chronicle of the events leading to the campus-wide controversy.

After documentation of numerous incidents of anti-gay and lesbian harassment at Liberal

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[9] Sedgwick (1990) defines the minoritizing view as suggesting "that there is a distinct population of persons who 'really are' gay" (p. 85), that homosexuality is "an issue of act[ual] importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority" (p. 1), and the universalizing, or majoritarian, view "that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of stable id[e]ntities" (p. 85), and thus homosexuality is "an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities" (p. 1).

U in the late 1980s, a task force was created to investigate problems faced by lesbian and gay students. The task force recommended an office for educational and support services, a proposal that gradually made its way through proper channels to be approved in the Spring of 1994. After it was announced that the office was allocated $50,000 a year, letters from the local constituency and from within the university were sent to the administration protesting the use of university (*public*) money to support the office. In newspaper interviews, university administrators described the letters as arguing that the office was intended for a special interest group and not for all students, and would be a social club (recruitment center) that promoted a "homosexual lifestyle." Basing its rhetorical stance on equity issues of creating a safe learning environment for all students through support and education, the administration pointed to increased reports of anti-gay harassment on the campus to defend the office. Thus, the polemic of the office began around three discursive strands: (1) a liberal humanist rights discourse that argues that an identifiable minority population is not receiving educational equity; (2) an unwitting invocation of majoritarian discourse that recognizes the instability of categories of sexuality and implicitly denaturalizes heterosexuality through the fear that homosexuality can be promoted; (3) a minoritarian discourse of gays and lesbians as victims in need of special institutional support and protection and a general public in need of education about a specific population.

When the following academic year began, a state representative entered the fray, combining morality, money, and willful ignorance in an argument that the university would promote an immoral, private lifestyle by recognizing homosexuality through public support of

an office. The imposition of ignorance and disacknowledgment implicit in the heterosexism of the legislator's statements have the effect, as Estella Bensimon (1992) has suggested, of "construct[ing] lesbians and gay men as isolated exceptions, so that they and their sexuality come to be seen, by many heterosexuals at least, as private and individual" (p. 99). The legislator threatened to hold the university's budget hostage in the next legislative meeting if the university funded the office. For several months, the student and local papers were filled with first-page stories, editorials, and letters to the editor, as protests on both sides began and events unfolded. Gay and lesbian student groups formed a coalition and mounted a series of protests, undertook letter-writing campaigns, and participated in meetings with the legislator and the administration. Concurrently, but with more than the usual fanfare, the "traditional" gay and lesbian fall events at the university took place: a kiss-in (complete with two front-page newspaper photos) and a march for National Coming Out Day. To counter these events, a conservative group held a "Straight Pride Week" in order to demonstrate the absurdity of rallying around a sexuality that should be private. They staged a hug-in, wore t-shirts that said "Damn Straight," and held a "debate" over the existence of the gay and lesbian center.

Finally, the university announced that the office would be funded privately by an anonymous donor, thus leaving intact the goal of having the office while escaping budgetary threats in the next legislative session. The ability of a single legislator, external to Liberal U (from a different district, in fact) yet representing the university's constituencies, to shape the administration's actions and policies offers an example of the constraints on Liberal U in responding autonomously to social changes. Feeling betrayed by the administration and arguing that private funding delegitimated their needs, gay and lesbian groups continued to protest;

however, with monetary concerns removed and the office's existence seemingly assured, interest waned and protest activity soon slowed.

The stances and tactics taken to rally for the office reveal discourses that circulate to define the ongoing events. The arguments posed by gay and lesbian persons, their supporters, and the administration, combine three elements:[10] (1) Identity politics is invoked to argue that gay men and lesbians are a pre-constituted minority group that pays taxes, is discriminated against, and merits its own office. In the logic of rights, this discourse includes the argument that the administration has a responsibility to represent the needs of gay and lesbian students, as is justified by the town's "recognition" of their minority status. In addition, liberalism is invoked to defend the separation of "private" judgments of groups and individuals from the domain of public affairs (Phelan, 1989). *"You are not regarding a population that should be your constituency." "As a public university, we both lead and respond to concerns expressed throughout the state. Sometimes our multiple constituencies come into conflict..." "Liberal U is a secular institution. The goal of the University is not to make moral judgments, but to educate."* (2) The pathology model of gay and lesbian needs due to harassment is expanded as a justificatory scheme, displacing the political implications implicit in the creation of the office. In this defensive posture, support and counseling neutralize politics. *"Our energies should be focused on providing services to the gay and lesbian community. In the last four years, the incidence of harassment against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals more than doubled." "The intent*

[10] The italicized statements constitute part of the flow of words and rhetoric around the creation of the office. Sources include: newspaper articles, editorials and letters, e-mails to the President, brochures, documents, and leaflets. Speakers include: the legislator, administrators, students, faculty, staff, alumni of Liberal U, and citizens of Oasis.

is to provide a safe learning environment and not to advocate a lifestyle or political agenda." "The office is not a political statement, but a support service to a population of students in need." "It's important for people to know this isn't going to be a hotbed of political activity." (3) Identity politics, educational equity, and pathology combine to form an argument for the symbolic importance of social and institutional legitimation of the gay and lesbian population through the center. Thus, gay and lesbian identity politics become intertwined with rhetoric of the purposes of education and the role of the university in allowing equal access to learning, educating the general public, and validating a population. *"The first problem is that education can only take place in an environment in which everyone has free access to educational resources." "The university's unwillingness to publicly fund the center sets up an official closet and suggests gays and lesbians are not of equal value." "Our university appears on the brink of denying identity to a large number of students based on their sexuality." "The university should provide support to the sexual minority community and increase awareness within the general population."* (4) Academia, a sphere separate from the "real" world, is figured as responsible both for leading and responding to social change. *"Tolerance and diversity are 'in' and the university will appear to be a backwater if it does not acknowledge gay men and lesbians by funding the office." "It is unethical ... for a university to extend the closet mentality of the general world to the campus."*

Stances against the center operated within a similar discursive field: (1) Minoritarian arguments state that (public) university funds should be spent on services that benefit all students rather than a small minority. In other words, (homo)sexuality is not the concern of all students. Paradoxically, majoritarian discourse, in the form of fear of promotion and recruitment,

intersects with this outrage at the legitimation of the minority. *"Tax money should not pay for the agendas of special interest groups." "Many of the majority feel alienated and ask themselves why there are no 'special' funds designated for them." "I believe it's going to be used as a tool to say, 'the state university promotes us, so that gives us an excuse to promote our lifestyle.'" "It's still promoting a certain lifestyle above all others." "It gives credence to an immoral lifestyle and may sway people on the fence about which way to go." "Why should the majority be forced to pay for an office they will never step foot in?"* (2) Public acknowledgment and display of difference augments separatism. Highlighting difference increases hostility and homophobic acts and limits possibilities of equality (understood as sameness) and acceptance of gays and lesbians by the mainstream. *"If they're trying to get all this equality, why make such a big deal?" "They aren't going to be accepted if they insist on being different." "It's strange they're showing their emotions to prove something [at the kiss-in]." "The office will just further exclude homosexuals from the mainstream campus." "When people are going to do things that aren't mainstream American, they're going to be discriminated against more." "I don't have any problem with them personally, but the way they are going about it is disruptive to the campus. They should just talk to each other about it."* (3) Ethnic models of identity politics are challenged in arguments that (dangerous) gay men and lesbians are not a legitimate minority in that they have the choice to be the way they are and can also opt to conceal their minority status, which makes them an inauthentic minority. *"Gays and lesbians can avoid discrimination if they want to, not like racial minorities." "They elect to make it public or private." "True minorities are different than special interest groups because*

they look different." "It is only a matter of time before the bathrooms of [ ] Hall will be used nonstop for activities that defy the original purposes of bathrooms." "There are health hazards associated with the gay lifestyle." (4) Diversity is said to take priority over academics in arguments that the university is bowing to Political Correctness (PC) pressures, creating an academic culture of victims and oppressed groups, whose ideas matter without regard to their content. Gay and lesbian concerns and unnecessary attempts at education are the most recent manifestation of this trend. *"It's just part of an effort to bring liberal ideas to the Liberal U campus." "Once again Liberal U has sold its soul to diversity. Once again it has designated a disproportionate amount of student funds to promote the different lifestyle of a small student group. Once again, the university has attempted to assuage tensions by promoting the very differences that created them." "The office shows just how far the administration has been distracted from the true mission of the university: the education of great ideas. [They are] letting standards decline from the exposure of students to great ideas to the ideas of the latest group to achieve 'victim' or 'oppressed' status." "I don't need to be educated. I know what homosexuality is, that there are many homosexuals, and that it's wrong to hate someone because he or she is gay. That's all I need to know." "Support? What ever happened to emotional self-sufficiency?"*.

The arguments for and against the office are structured, in many ways, around issues of minority status--defining a minority, recognizing and legitimating a minority, and invoking or arguing against that group's rights. The strategy of constituting gay men and lesbians as an aggrieved group that has not received an equitable education (while disavowing political work) is consonant with the constituency-based logic of Liberal U's democratic impulse. Although this

strategy ultimately won the students the office, it has done little to shift discourses of sexuality at Liberal U and may very well reinscribe them. Tenuous minority status, "special interest" hostilities, and the equality/difference binary remain unchallenged.

On the other hand, one effect of the discourses is to chip away at institutionalized ignorance. As Michael Warner (1995) has observed, "Because being queer necessarily involves and is defined by a drama of acknowledgment, a theater of knowledge and publicization, the institutions that transmit and certify knowledge take on special importance" (p. 285). At Liberal U, gay and lesbian presence has been certified on the institutional stage; gay and lesbian identity has received a quasi-legitimation in the institutional public sphere through private money. However, precisely what is acknowledged (where it is acknowledged) is an identity, *from* which differences are presumed to emanate. In other words, campus talk is structured by discourses of identity, in which identity is thought to precede difference--rather than the other way around. Furthermore, the differences thought to follow from this pre-existing identity are reinscribed in the existence of the office, which embodies the negative differences of this identity as it accommodates through counseling the special problems of this newly acknowledged group. Acknowledgment of gay men and lesbians at Liberal U is less acknowledgment of the construction of queerness per se or of the effects of institutionalized heterosexism and homophobia than it is of the individualized problems emanating from a pre-existing homosexual identity. The challenge to social and institutional relations in the production of differences and to the public/private dichotomy thus shifts only slightly, in the form of talk of equity, personal support, and education. Difference as a structural question produced in relations of power is

displaced by a liberal humanist conception of difference as a social, surface-level problem (Seidman, 1993; Tierney, 1993b).[11]

The university's choice of director reveals the administration's emphasis on individual support. The director himself explained to me:

> Actually, as I think about the interview process, I think the best question that was asked was ... "This job basically takes someone who has some counseling skills and who's an educator, and is," I don't believe they used the word activist, "advocate," they said, "and each of the three candidates seems to have a specialty in each of those areas, which do you think is the most important, and why?" And I think my response is perhaps what, well, among the things that got me the job. I just said, "you need someone with some counseling background, who can build some bridges here, who understands that education is a lot about hearing the questions that are being asked and understanding the questions behind what's being asked, and also knowing that even activists need some support. But I think you need someone to build some bridges here. I network well, you need someone to build community here," so I think that suggests something of the direction they wanted to go in.

The values embraced in supporting and sustaining the office reveal its distance from both activism and academic affairs and its focus on individuals. The function of the office has become, as the director told me, "a space to hang out," a place to get personal support in coming out, and a source for information and referrals. In the newspaper, he said, "We are not an office for activists. We are really an office for students who are struggling in a *personal* way with issues, students doing research and students who need information or referral. It is not as glamorous as organizing kiss-ins." As the assistant to the director said, "Will it make a movement change? I doubt it. But it's certainly affecting individual lives." Whether the

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11 I do not mean to ignore the very real needs of very real young persons who may benefit from such services. Rather, I wish to point to the ways in which psychologizing gay men and lesbians elides consideration of the production of identities and of forms of activism that are not predicated on individual or group identity models (e.g., Martin & Mohanty, 1986; Sandoval, 1991).

director's disavowals of activism are for the purposes of justifying the office's funding or earnest descriptions of his intentions is difficult to evaluate, though my conversation with him suggested the latter. Regardless, the existence of the office, despite its limitations, does offer individuals and groups resources that may be put to new uses over time.

Now that the office has existed for nearly a year, a number of faculty, staff, and students spoke positively about its symbolic existence in the university. For them, the office confers credibility (through acknowledgment) on gay men and lesbians, signifying "institutional commitment," as one staff member described it, through "an office, a space, a sign." A lesbian undergraduate student explained to me: "It's a real source of pride. It legitimizes it for a lot of people. We're accepted by the university, and that's true for straight people and people coming out." Another staff member believes that "it's a form of recognition that gay and lesbian students are important on this campus and we're going to give some services and recognition to the fact that they exist here." A faculty member explained: "It's for the quieter students who are trying to figure things out, what's right and what's wrong, university values." Although the explicit function of the office, in keeping with the functions of other diversity offices at Liberal U, is not to promote social or institutional change, some members of the university in fact understand it as representing and promising institutional recognition and transformation as well as individual self-affirmation.

Not all, however, are in agreement that the office's importance lies in recognition and support. Meg, who organized protests in favor of the center, spoke of the importance of uncovering the workings of institutionalized homophobia:

> I'm not interested in that pathological model, and I'm not invested in the final product. I was invested in the struggle and making a lot of noise about the wheeling and dealing that was happening in terms of the ways that state governments and big business are involved in university affairs and the very pernicious kinds of--it's disturbing to me the discrepancy between what people think is going on and what's really going on, as was the case here. . . . And the kinds of interests that determine university policies in a number of ways, this was just a particularly ugly incarnation of it.

Her concerns are based in campus activists' failure to take into account external pressures on the administration. A second set of concerns was articulated by a faculty member worried about psychologizing gay and lesbian students:

> I have mixed feelings about it. I mean, I'm glad if there's a student organization, I think that that's important. When I hear that they've got peer counseling over there and they're trying to get a library of coming out novels and stuff like that, I start to worry a little bit that they're adopting the medical model and understanding the job of the institution as nurturing somebody through a deep and dark and painful psychological experience. And I don't think that that's what the university's job is in relation to this cohort of students. And I think it's dangerous in the long-run to pathologize gay and lesbian students. I think what they should be doing instead, and what I'm in favor of, is culture-building, the office sponsoring events that allow students to network, that allow students to explore questions of sexuality and cultural difference in a variety of ways, you know, reading groups, drag shows, dances, bringing in gay and lesbian performers to campus, or speakers, or things that would be defined as more cultural. I think that that's another way of dealing actually with the difficulty of coming out. It's a way of providing forums and community for people in order for them to work through that, ... you know, the cultural and intellectual thing, that's not like the medical model that says you need to be counseled because we don't want you to kill yourself sort of thing.

One year after the events around the opening of the center, gay and lesbian political activism was not as prevalent on the campus as it had been during the previous polemic fall. Although there were several social and cultural events of the sort the faculty member described, a week of events centering on National Coming Out Day was sparsely attended (some say due to poor publicity and advance notice). However, ongoing messages I received from the office's e-mail distribution list indicate that the office is facilitating community-building both at Liberal U and in Oasis. Notices ranged from announcements of movie series, speakers, dances, and

picnics, to the announcement of a new course in gay and lesbian issues, to meetings of new groups at a local coffeehouse, to requests for roommates, to announcements of local, state, and national political news, rallies, and conferences. In addition, several students spoke to me of groups they had formed or were planning to form--groups that would meet in the office's space. These groups went beyond support and coming out to consider the political implications of sexualities, to advocate for gay and lesbian studies courses in the curriculum, and to consider the intersections of race and sexuality. There are thus signs that individuals and groups may be appropriating the office as a resource for social, academic, cultural, and political networking beyond its stated purposes. In other words, while the office continues to have an (official) focus on individual counseling and community education, new coalitions, in the forms of culture-building and activism, are being facilitated by its presence. Movement beyond individualized services in the domain of the social and toward the academic and political, then, may be enabled by the resources provided.

Cultural Negotiation

Identities and the perspectives that are thought to accompany them are acknowledged at the level of the social at Liberal U, but not as they relate to knowledge production or structures of oppression. Even as identities are conceived as vehicles of institutional legitimation, for example, in light of federal hiring mandates, disciplinary demands for scholarship, and university and college-wide exigencies of accreditation, these identities become construed as problems that are specific to "groups'" needs, to be dealt with through centers and programs.

Practices and policies of diversity thus specify and distinguish groups. For example, the specific problems constructed around sexual orientation at Liberal U are distinct from those pertaining to race and gender. In contrast to racial minorities, who are (officially) rhetorically valued for the "diverse perspectives" they bring to the campus, gay men and lesbians are questioned at the level of legitimacy: Do they have a real minority status? Is this (immoral and dangerous) population to be officially acknowledged? However, because gay men and lesbians have been able to constitute themselves as a group, institutional policies for equitable education have become imperative. Nonetheless, sexual orientation does not enter faculty/student recruitment and retention programs (nor do I argue that it should); rather, equitable services and a safe environment are the limits of the "rights" discourses for this population. At the same time, there are parallels between the Black Cultural Center and the Gay and Lesbian Office, as they are both meant to accommodate specific populations by offering communal spaces. The Black Cultural Center is justified through the recruitment and retention of a population the administration purports to value as it justifies its democratic impulse. The Gay and Lesbian Office, however, is justified by a pathological model of individual counseling and education placed under the rubric of educational equity. Furthermore, the deficits in the two populations differ: gays need counseling; blacks need tutoring.

Although there are dilemmas inhering in the constitution of visible and vocal groups (a tactic that at times undermines and at others enables the very projects of the individuals who comprise those groups), the institutional context makes group identity an obvious tactic for seeking services. Although these services do not necessarily create change, as they do not shift social discourses, they do represent a means by which students may begin to enact new practices.

In other words, policies and offices--however significant--should not be understood as final products of change, but as part of and vehicles for ongoing change within liberalism. Codification in social or academic spheres can correspond to forms of containment--or a Foucauldian disciplining--and is not an end in itself. Rather, a fruitful line of questioning is: how are policies and the programs they allow subject to reinterpretation and ongoing negotiation in practice?

An area for further research suggested by models of cultural negotiation (e.g., de Certeau, 1984) is study of students' appropriations of such offices for purposes beyond the official, such as creating formal and informal social, political, and academic networks. In his theory of practice, de Certeau outlines his understanding of the ways extant systems may be appropriated by those who use them: "The order of things is precisely what 'popular' tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon. . . . Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistance" (p. 26). In this way, gay and lesbian groups may be understood as putting to their own uses practices of identity politics--a tactic that enables as it constrains--to make spaces within the institution for new forms of exchange and possibilities for resistance. Attention not only to policy and official response but to the planned and unplanned interventions they allow may yield significant insight into social and academic institutional change, its limitations and possibilities, and the ongoing articulations of policy and practice.

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